

**CITY OF ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
HISTORIC DESIGNATION EVALUATION
STAFF ANALYSIS
Chloethiel Woodard Smith Community Center Building
Chestnut Lodge**

**January 15, 2004
MEETING NO. 1-04**



**SUBJECT: Chloethiel Woodard Smith Community Center
LOCATION: 500 West Montgomery Avenue (on campus)
SIZE: Environmental setting to be determined if designated
OWNER: Washington Waldorf School, Sangamore Road, Bethesda MD
MEETING DATES: Public Hearing 12/18/03, continued to 1/15/04**

Note: This staff report summarizes the factual information and testimony received pertaining to the Community Center as of the close of business on January 8, 2004. The contract purchaser of the Chestnut Lodge property, The Associated Companies, indicated that they will submit a consultant's report on the building but it had not been received as of close of business January 8, 2004. The HDC may choose to close the record and make a recommendation based on testimony submitted to date, submitted up to and at the continuation of the public hearing on January 15, 2004, or continue the hearing and record to a date certain in future.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Chloethiel Woodard Smith Community Center at Chestnut Lodge be found eligible for designation as a single site (Landmark) Rockville Historic District in accordance with the adopted criteria. The evidence of the record has shown that Chloethiel Woodard Smith has been recognized in publications and by professional organizations as a master of her profession, that the subject building was an advancement in architectural design for mental health buildings, that the subject building was creatively designed within a tight budget for its purpose and for future expansion, and that the building and the work of Ms. Smith is notable in the history of architecture of the 20th Century and especially in the vocabulary of modern architecture. In addition, this building was cited as the only example of a Modern institutional structure by this noted architect in Rockville.

EVALUATION PROCESS

The Woodard Smith Community Center was nominated for consideration as a Rockville Historic District on October 24, 2003 by a representative of the Recent Past Preservation Network. No formal applications for site plans had been received by the City showing substantial alteration, adverse impact, or demolition of the building, but a series of preliminary site plan discussions for a residential development were held with planning staff and the HDC which did not include the building.

The site must be evaluated for historical, cultural, architectural, or archeological significance to the City of Rockville according to criteria specified by State law (attached.) The HDC is limited to consideration and evaluation according to these criteria so that the Mayor and Council have a clear understanding of the historic significance and value of the property to Rockville to weigh against other arguments. After a determination is made, a recommendation of eligibility may be rendered to the Mayor and Council. If recommended as eligible and the Mayor and Council vote to proceed with a Map Amendment to rezone the property as a historic district, both the Mayor and Council and the Planning Commission may consider other information in making a recommendation or a decision to designate the property. Since the building is part of a larger property consisting of approximately 20 acres, the Mayor and Council must define an environmental setting for the building and district if it is designated.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notices of the HDC evaluation were sent via first class mail to adjacent and confronting property owners, Citizen's Associations and other interested parties on December 11, 2003. The agenda for the evaluation meeting was also sent via email to Rockville Agenda subscribers, was posted on the City's HDC agenda site on the Internet and the property was posted with an information sign.

BACKGROUND

The Woodard Smith Community Center was constructed in three phases, from 1954 through 1972. It was designed by Chloethiel Woodard Smith F.A.I.A., of the prominent Washington architectural firm of Keyes, Smith, Satterlee & Lethbridge. The original section was built as the first phase of a planned recreational, social and occupational therapy complex that was designed to be expandable. The wall panels were a standard measure and removable, so that an addition could be easily joined without the need for structural adjustments.

The structure is steel frame with exposed open web ceiling beams carrying the majority of the load, thereby creating large interior spaces, uninterrupted by load-bearing walls, piers, or other supports. The roof is flat with much of the mechanicals located there. The walls originally consisted of glazed panels with brick veneer end walls. The glazed panels are large single panes of glass topped with smaller removable top panels for ventilation and protected by smaller floor-level colored unbreakable plastic panels. Over the years, some panels have been replaced, either with clear or translucent colored glass or plastic.

Smith designed an addition on the north side in 1958 that almost doubled the building's square footage. A large wing was then added in 1972 to house a cafeteria and additional therapeutic activity space. The additions closely follow the original design, form, and materials. They use a similar structural system of steel columns and open web beams and mimic the glazing pattern of the original building.

TESTIMONY

The following oral testimony was heard and entered into the record of the public hearing on the Woodard Smith Community Center held on December 18, 2003.

The following individuals or organizations testified in opposition to designation:

Chuck Spitulnik, represented the Washington Waldorf School. The school opposed designation, as it, together with previous designations of the front eight acres and the Rose Hill Barn, would render the property impossible to develop and force financial failure of the school if the property cannot be sold or developed.

Jody Kline, Esq. represented the contract purchaser, The Associated Companies. Mr. Kline stated that the contract purchaser was opposed to designation and did not find the building eligible. He noted that it was not identified as a historic resource or a building of note during past research and surveys of the site. He stated that it would not be an appropriate addition to the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District either in character or location. He said the contract purchaser would submit testimony from a qualified consultant in the near future.

Jack Cohen, F.A.I.A. was a colleague of Ms. Smith. While recognizing her talent and influence on architects that followed her, he stated that this building was built on a limited budget, is not a quality project and is in poor condition. He stated that it could not be readily upgraded to modern use, and is not representative of Ms. Smith's best work.

Pat Reber, Rockville resident and Washington Waldorf School parent, stated that the building does not have a presence on the site, is not an attractive building, and is not associated with the site by the general public. The Chestnut Lodge site is characterized by the Lodge building and the front lawn and trees, which the contract purchaser intends to maintain.

Eileen McGuckian, Director of Peerless Rockville, said the Board of Peerless Rockville recognized that the building meets the criteria for eligibility as a historic district, but does not support the designation due to the timing of the nomination after a contract purchaser was selected and a proposal made known. She also cited the lack of identification of the building during prior property surveys.

Bridget Newton, President of the West End Civic Association (WECA), said that the proposed residential development at Chestnut Lodge had been presented at a recent board meeting but designation of the Community Center had not been specifically addressed. She asked that the record be kept open for a period of time to allow the WECA board time to discuss it and compile comments for the HDC.

Patricia Woodward worked at Chestnut Lodge as a head nurse in group therapy from the early 1960s to the late 1970s. She stated that the Community Center primarily served as a meeting place for groups who then participated in activities at other sites on the campus. An annual psychiatric symposium was held at the Center, but patient activities were more often held at the kiosk (now demolished), the pond or other places. She said the Community Center was not a very important building when she worked at the hospital although it was used more often after the cafeteria was added in 1972.

The following individuals or organizations testified in favor of designation at the public hearing:

John Hartranft, Rockville resident and Maryland state representative for the Recent Past Preservation Network (RPPN) concurred with the written submission submitted by Christine Madrid French citing Ms. Smith's accomplishments and evidence of professional recognition. He noted that he was pleased that a building of the recent past was being evaluated in a public forum. He said that the Community Center meets several of Rockville's designation criteria and is adaptable to new uses. He said that the building was held up as a great example of the Modern Movement at a symposium held last year at the University of Maryland.

Corri Jiminez spoke as a Rockville citizen and, as a member of the Recent Past Preservation Network, the nominator of the Community Center. She concurred with the submission by RPPN and submitted a list of the designation criteria that the building meets and cited the 1955 Architectural Forum article in which the building was featured as a notable accomplishment in mental health architecture. She said the building has not been altered, was designed by a master architect, and should be designated.

Jim Pickel lives at 135 South Van Buren Street in a house designed by Chloethiel Woodard Smith c. 1947-48. He said that his house has many similarities to the Community Center, including the blurring between inside and outside, the flat roof, and the open feel. He said that this type of architecture affects how we look at the outside world.

Wayne Goldstein, President of Montgomery Preservation, Inc. noted that experts in the field of architecture, notably Richard Longstreth, Joey Lampl, and Isabelle Gournay, had determined that the building has significance. He cited two other modern buildings, which have received much support for their preservation – the Canada Dry Bottling Plant and the Silver Theatre, both in Silver Spring. He offered potential reuse ideas.

Written testimony was received from Isabelle Gournay, Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of Maryland, Christine Madrid French, President of the Recent Past Preservation Network, Richard Longstreth, Professor of American Civilization, The George Washington University, Elizabeth Jo Lampl, Architectural Historian, and James C. Benton, President of the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly and a board member of the Capitol Park II complex, one of the residential projects designed by Chloethiel Woodard Smith. Several who testified orally also submitted written notes or testimony for the record. The record is available on the Internet at <http://www.rockvillemd.gov/government/commissions/hdc/2003/1303.html>

Additional comments were received after the hearing from Jody Kline, attorney for the contract purchaser. Mr. Kline withdrew his remarks of December 18, 2003 on the inappropriate character and location of the building as an addition to the West Montgomery Historic District upon clarification that it was proposed as a single site historic district. Mr. Kline, representing the contract purchaser, also stated that a written report would be submitted on behalf of his client. Staff has not received further testimony or comment from any party as of January 8, 2004.

STAFF ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, AND CONCLUSION

Staff concurs with the nominator and letters of support and testimony from Dr. Gournay, Dr. Longstreth, Ms. French and Ms. Lampl and those who offered testimony in favor of designation at the public hearing that the Chloethiel Woodard Smith Community Center on the campus of the Chestnut Lodge Sanitarium

at 500 West Montgomery Avenue meets the criteria for designation as a single site local historic district by the City of Rockville.

A number of concerns were raised which are not valid criteria for this process, but would be valid for consideration before the Planning Commission and the Mayor and Council. They are:

- Quality and cost of building materials: A proposed designation should be evaluated as representative of its type and not by the quality of materials. Otherwise, log buildings and other vernacular structures that are part of the historical record would be excluded.
- Better examples elsewhere: This evaluation is for significance to the City of Rockville only.
- Financial harm to the owner: Not listed in criteria.
- Financial and development constraint on contract purchaser: Not listed in criteria.
- Not mentioned in prior studies of the Chestnut Lodge site, master plans for the City, or historic resources map: Not listed in criteria.
- Not associated or well known by the public: The building is evaluated for its merit and significance overall as well as a public landmark.

Staff found that the Community Center meets the criteria for eligibility as a single site historic district in that Chloethiel Woodard Smith has been recognized in publications and by professional organizations as a master of her profession, that the subject building was an advancement in architectural design for mental health buildings, that the subject building was creatively designed within a tight budget for its purpose and for future expansion, and that the building and the work of Ms. Smith is notable in the history of architecture of the 20th Century and especially in the vocabulary of modern architecture.

Attachment A

CITY OF ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION CRITERIA

CHECKLIST

Level of site significance: (Check those that apply)

- ☐ Local
- ☐ State
- ☐ National

Condition of structure and site:

- ☐ "Substantially Altered" (basic shape, original façade plan, windows and doors have been obscured or changed.)
- ☐ Minor alterations (porch removal or enclosure, roof material replacement, siding added over old siding, basic mass and fenestration intact.
- ☐ Original or near original condition (all changes reversible)
- ☐ Outbuildings present and recognizable
- ☐ Original site and setting largely preserved. (lot size, environmental character, trees, setbacks, streetscape)

Standing structures and sites, including archeological sites, must be determined to be significant in one or more of the following criteria to be found eligible for designation:

A. Historical and cultural significance:

- ☐ Has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the **City**
- ☐ Has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the **County**
- ☐ Has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the **State**
- ☐ Has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the **Nation**
- ☐ Is the site of a significant historic event,
- ☐ Is identified with a person or a group of persons who influenced society;
- ☐ Exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political or historic heritage of the County and its communities; or has

B. Architectural and design significance:

- ☐ Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction;
- ☐ Represents the work of a master;
- ☐ Possesses high artistic values;
- ☐ Represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- ☐ Represents an established or familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or county due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape.